

Conference on New England Archaeology

When is 'Enough' Enough?

The Archaeological Curation Crisis in the 21st Century

Meeting at Old Sturbridge Village
Sturbridge, Massachusetts
May 2, 2015

Ten years ago, the Heritage Health Index quantified the truth behind archaeology's "dirty little secret". It showed that over 60% of our national collections—nearly 3 billion artifacts—have sustained damage due to improper storage, with more than a quarter existing in a constant state of deterioration in institutions with no environmental controls. The passage of historic preservation legislation in the 1960s, '70s, and '90s ushered in an era of unprecedented discovery and collections gathering empowered by federal mandates to minimize the effects of development on buried and extant cultural resources. Subsequently, archaeological research in both academic and CRM endeavors has amassed a staggering amount of objects and information that now languishes in deteriorating bags and boxes—poorly curated, underreported, and orphaned from its associated contextual documentation. Awareness is no longer the issue. Immediate action and thoughtful planning is necessary if archaeology intends to remain a sustainable and meaningful enterprise. We must begin to develop workable solutions to a problem we've been facing for the past four decades—a problem that will continue to worsen until we can begin to think critically about what we collect, for what purpose, and why it deserves to be preserved in perpetuity.

Conference Schedule

9:00-9:30	Coffee and breakfast
9:30-9:45	Greetings and Introduction: Danielle Cathcart, Chair
9:45-10:15	Joseph M. Bagley (Boston City Archaeologist): <i>Obligations and Opportunities of Old Collections, a Boston Perspective</i>
10:15-10:45	Andrea Lain, Jonathan Lothrop, & Michael Lucas (New York State Museum): <i>An Embarrassment of Riches: Archaeological Collections Management at the New York State Museum</i>
10:45-11:15	Allie Crowder (MHC TSD): <i>No Opportunity is Too Small: The History of Archaeological Collections Management at the Massachusetts Historical Commission</i>
11:15-11:45	Alicia Paresi (National Park Service): <i>A Horrible Quantity of Stuff: Archeological Collections Management in the Northeast Region of the National Park Service</i>
11:45-12:15	Questions and Discussion
12:15-2:00*	Lunch (on your own)
	*The museum has waived its fee for conference attendees ; extra time is allotted for tours.
2:00-2:30	Business Meeting
2:30-3:00	Jess Robinson & Scott Dillon (VT State): <i>Curation Crisis, Data Crisis... Perceptions and Realities in Data Collection and Retention in Vermont and Beyond</i>
3:00-3:30	Heather Olson (The Public Archaeology Lab, Inc.): <i>Beyond Curation in the Twenty-First Century: An Example from Cultural Resource Management</i>
3:30-4:00	Ellen Marlatt (Independent Archaeological Consulting, LLC): <i>Update on National Efforts to Address the "Curation Crisis"</i>
4:00-4:30	Questions and Discussion
4:30-5:00	Closing reception and final poster viewings

Posters

1. Roxanne E. Guildford & Nathan D. Hamilton (Univ. of Southern Maine): *Zooarchaeology of Smuttynose Island: A Study of Trophic Relationships in Historic Isles of Shoals*
2. John M. Kelly (Public Archaeology Laboratory Inc.): *Health A Comparison of Post-Contact Lithic Technology Through European Flint Assemblages at the Monhantic Fort site on the Mashantucket Pequot reservation in Connecticut and the Aptuxet Trading Post site in Bourne, Massachusetts*
3. Janice Nosal (UMass Boston): *Bringing the Neighborhood Back to Life: Working-Class Consumption and Identity in 19th-Century Roxbury, Massachusetts*

Position Paper

A Starting Point: A Preliminary Guide to Archaeological Collections Curation

Danielle Cathcart, The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc.

Since its inception in 1979, the CNEA has welcomed a diverse community of professional archaeologists, students, and avocationalists to share their findings and discuss issues relevant to New England archaeology. As we continue in this mission, I feel it is time to highlight the ongoing collections crisis facing nearly every governmental, academic, and cultural institution in the nation. For the past forty years, academic and CRM archaeologists have amassed a staggering amount of artifacts and records that now languish in deteriorating bags and boxes—poorly curated, underreported, and orphaned from their associated contextual documentation. Archaeologists and historic preservationists must constantly be aware of how we are perceived by non-specialists and strive to remain a meaningful enterprise in the eyes of our colleagues and constituents. An essential component of this effort is to ensure the continued survival of the artifacts we rely on to interpret the past. It is those same artifacts that bring to life so many mundane and little recorded moments of everyday life that the general public finds so compelling about archaeology.

Several scholars and professional organizations have acknowledged the complex issues surrounding the proper curation of archaeological materials including, but not limited to, collection strategies, artifact processing, storage, ownership, culling, deaccessioning, and access to collections (Childs 2004). Members of the Society for Historical Archaeology are ethically bound to follow the organization's published standards and guidelines for the curation of archaeological collections (SHA 1993). The SHA guide expands on the federal standards outlined in 36 CFR 79 with more detailed recommendations regarding artifact cleaning, labeling, storage, conservation protocols, and the characteristics of an adequate curation facility. Others researchers like Greg Stemm and David Bederman in "Virtual Collections & Private Curators: A Model for the Museum of the Future" advocate for a more web-based approach to collections management that would digitize artifact information then create partnerships with private individuals whereby "collections would be preserved, collectors and other members of the interested public would be engaged, and the museums would both free up space and gain some needed revenue" (King 2013). Other researchers like Voss (2012), King (2014), and many of this year's conference participants, encourage what King terms "collections-based research" in which new research questions are answered using pre-existing assemblages regardless of their condition or presence of associated documentation. King (2014) encourages researchers to "dig less, catalog more" so that when new collections are inevitably generated, we ensure the long-term survival of those objects deemed significant enough curate.

We've all faced the difficult reality of insufficient time, money and resources to fully process collections or provide for stable and permanent storage once excavation is complete. Often, these situations can be avoided with thoughtful planning, realistic budgeting, and a willingness to establish field collection/discard priorities as needed during the course of a project. Table 1 provides a breakdown of basic packaging supplies and storage costs that reflect current prices listed by specific vendors and will be helpful in developing sensible curation plans. These items represent necessary tools in starting any new or rehabilitative curation effort, although quantities and costs differ depending on the size and composition of the collection. In general, a standard Hollinger size box of curated materials can hold approximately 800 artifacts packaged according to federal standards and costs between \$40-\$70 depending on agency or facility requirements.

Given the destructive nature of archaeology, it is incumbent upon its practitioners to ensure that the physical evidence we do retrieve is made available for the researchers who will inherit these assemblag-

Table 1. Start-up Curation Costs

Category	Product	Vendor	Cost/ unit
Packaging	2ml Polyethylene Zip-top bags (3 x 5")	U.S Plastics	\$12.44
	2ml Polyethylene Zip-top bags (6 x 6")	U.S Plastics	\$27.16
	2ml Polyethylene Zip-top bags (8 x 10")	U.S Plastics	\$52.21
	Inner packing box (11 3/4 x 6 3/4 x 4 3/4")	Hollinger Metal Edge	\$8.70
	Record storage box (12 x 15 x 10")	Hollinger Metal Edge	\$6.95
	Acid-free tissue (30 x 250" roll)	Hollinger Metal Edge	\$82.50
	Letter document case (12 1/4 x 10 1/4 x 5")	Hollinger Metal Edge	\$6.95
	Archival file folders	ULINE	\$44.00
	Archival paper	General office supply store	\$25.00
	pH Test pen	Light Impressions	\$6.20
	Sheet Protectors	Avery	\$7.37
	Ethafoam sheets (recommended)	University Products	\$87.15
	pH Neutral Adhesive - 4.oz	Blick Art Materials	\$6.05
Total Supplies (initial order)			\$372.68
Curation	Climate-Controlled 5 x 10 x 8' Storage Unit	General Self-Storage	\$100/ mo.
	Labor	-	\$15/hr.

es which, in some cases, represents the only tangible proof of human activity in the region. Beyond the logistical challenges, many archaeologists have little or no formal training in collections management practices. Regardless of our specific area of interest or expertise, it is our responsibility to be at least conversant in up-to-date curatorial practices. One simple solution every laboratory should adopt is to develop standardized protocols for artifact tracking, processing, and packaging that remain consistent for every collection. Lastly, understanding how different states codify the disposition and treatment of artifacts resulting from permitted undertakings enables every practitioner to not only be in compliance with state and federal regulations, but also responsibly contribute to the massive stockpile of existing archaeological data (see Table 2).

When rehabilitating an orphaned or unstable collection, it is difficult to know where to begin or how to efficiently coordinate your re-curation effort. Once begun, however, the thrill of rediscovery more than compensates for the tedium of re-sorting, re-bagging, and re-boxing. Upon request I would be happy to provide a curation tool-kit to any person or institution in need of a basic methodology for rehabilitating unstable archaeological collections or interested in updating existing artifact curation standards. The tool-kit includes a task checklist and assessment form, as well as templates for artifact tags, box labels and inventories, that I have found really helpful in capturing vital information and stabilizing actively deteriorating collections. Curation protocols are by no means one-size fits all, but finding a starting point is half the battle. Curators should also devise a procedure for culling and/or sampling superfluous or redundant material like un-processed soil samples and non-diagnostic furnace and structural debris if they are not integral to site interpretation. Also, I would strongly recommend visiting the Heritage Preservation website at www.heritagepreservation.org for free downloadable resources for developing an emergency preparedness plan. Even the most careful curation effort can be instantly undone by storing artifacts in facilities without proper environmental controls and safeguards against natural disasters. Please feel free to contact me via email at daniellecathcart@gmail.com or dcathcart@palinc.com, or by phone at (757) 274-8032.

When is 'Enough' Enough?

Table 2. Summary of Northeast and Federal Curation Standards.

State	Main Repository	Fee	Standards/ Guidelines	Pertinent Legislation	Contact	Email/Phone	Title of Curation Standards/Other Online Resource
CT	Office of State Archaeology and the Museum of Natural History at Uconn	\$300/box	Contact State Ar- chaeologist	CT Gen Stat § 10-383 [2012]	Brian Jones, State Archaeologist	brian.jones@uconn.edu	"Office of State Archaeology Con- necticut State Muse- um of Natural Histo- ry Repository Poli- cy"
ME	ME State Museum	Facility Specific	Facility Specific	State Rules 94-089 Chapter 812 and 27 MRSA § 376	Earle G. Shettle- worth, Jr., Director and State Historic Preservation Officer	Earle.Shettleworth@maine.gov	None found
MA	State designated facilities	Facility specific	None found	950 CMR 70	Brona Simon, State Archaeologist/SHPO	Brona.Simon@sec.state.ma.us	Contact State Archaeologist
NH	NHDHR Facility	None found	Available Online	19 NHS § 227-C:5	Richard Boisvert, Deputy SHPO/State Archaeologist	(603) 271-6433	"Curation Guide- line" access via NH Division of Histori- cal Resources
NJ	Any facility that meets Federal Cu- ration Standards	Facility specific	Refer to NJ State Museum Standards	NJ P.L. 2004, Chap- ter 170	Jessie Cohen, Regis- trar-Bureau of Ar- chaeology & Ethnol- ogy	Jessie.cohen@sos.state.nj.us	"Archaeological Requirements" ac- cess via NJ Historic Trust and "Guidelines for Phase I Archaeolog- ical Investigations: Identification of Archaeological Re- sources" access via state.nj.us
NY	State designated facilities	Facility specific	Available Online, or Contact NY State Museum	NY EDN. Law § 233- 234	Andrea Lain, Collec- tions Manager NY State Museum, or Ruth L. Pierpont, Deputy Commission- er for Historic Preser- vation/Deputy SHPO	518-268-2171	"Minimum Stand- ards for Preparing Archaeological Col- lections" or "Cultural Resource Standards Hand- book"

Table 2. Summary of Northeast and Federal Curation Standards (continued).

State	Main Repository	Fee	Standards/ Guidelines	Pertinent Legislation	Contact	Email/Phone	Title of Curation Standards/Other Online Resource
PA	PA State Museum	\$350/cu. Foot	Available Online	PA History Code Title 37 § 501 - 512	Janet Johnson, Cura- tor State Museum of Pennsylvania	717-705-0869	"Curation Guide- lines: Preparing Archaeological Col- lections for Submis- sion to The State Museum of Pennsyl- vania"
RI	RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commis- sion	\$25/box	Contact RIHPHC Archaeology De- partment	R.I.G.L 42- 45	Edward F. Sander- son, Deputy SHPO/ Executive Director RIHPHC	Ed- ward.Sanderson@preservation. ri.gov	"Performance Stand- ards and Guidelines for Archaeology in Rhode Island"
VT	VT Archaeology Heritage Center	\$400/box	Available Online	22 V.S.A. Chapter 14 §764-5	Jess Robinson, State Archaeologist	Jess.Robinson@state.vt.us	"Guidance for Con- sultants and Agen- cies Transferring Collections to the VT Archaeology Heritage Center" and "The Vermont State Historic Preservation Office's Guidelines for Con- ducting Archaeolo- gy in Vermont & Appendices"
Feder- al	Agency Specific	Facility Specific	Available Online	36 CFR 79, 48 Federal Register 44716- 44742	Alicia Paresi, Curator of Archaeology Northeast Museum Services Center, NPS	alicia_paresi@nps.gov	NPS-"Curation of Federally Owned and Administered Archaeological Col- lections" DOD- "Archaeological Collections Manage- ment Procedures"

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For a copy of Danielle's complete Curation Tool Kit, please email cnea.membership@gmail.com.

**Conference
Presentation
Abstracts
9:45-11:45**

9:45 *Obligations and Opportunities of Old Collections, a Boston Perspective*

Joseph M. Bagley (Boston City Archaeologist)

The City of Boston Archaeology Laboratory contains dozens of archaeological assemblages totaling just under 2,000 boxes. The vast majority of these collections were excavated between 1975 and 1995, which poses a monumental challenge of re-cataloging, re-organizing, and re-analyzing collections that have defined the early history of Northeast historical archaeology. These collections also represent a great opportunity for students and researchers to examine collections without the risks associated with new fieldwork, which too often results in a lack of relevant data, redesigned theses, and years of additional enrollment. Beyond the realm of academia, these assemblages represent ideal opportunities for public engagement through the sharing of collection highlights online, display opportunities, or involving the public in the process of re-discovery of old collections. This paper celebrates Boston's approach to the inclusion of public interaction and academic research in older collections.

10:15 *An Embarrassment of Riches: Archaeological Collections Management at the New York State Museum*

Andrea Lain, Jonathan Lothrop, & Michael Lucas (New York State Museum)

Founded in 1859, the New York State Museum is the oldest state natural history museum in the country. The NYSM curates major archaeological collections currently totaling over 4 million artifacts, with new collections accepted periodically. Held in trust for all New Yorkers, these collections provide a basis for researching Native American and Euro-American occupations in New York from the Ice Age into the early 20th century. Like most museums and curation facilities, however, we face space limitations that threaten the viability of our mission to continue building the NYSM archaeological collections. We first discuss the types of collections offered for curation, and the decision process that we employ for accepting some but not all potential donations. We then describe ongoing and potential future strategies to maximize archaeological collections space at the NYSM.

10:45 *No Opportunity is too Small: The History of Archaeological Collections Management at the Massachusetts Historical Commission*

Allie Crowder (MHC TSD)

As the office of the State Archaeologist, the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) is in a unique situation with regards to the curation of state-owned archaeological collections. The lack of funding for the curation of archaeological collections has meant that for many years, the State Archaeologist did not have the space or the money to rescue state-owned collections that were in need of attention. This was recognized as being a problem in the early 1990s, and steps began to be taken in order to create a collections management program at the MHC. This paper will explore how, through a combination of large projects, state funding, federal grants, public interest, hard work, and ingenuity, the Massachusetts Historical Commission has been able to seize several small opportunities in order to provide large changes to the state of its collections management program.

11:15 *A Horrible Quantity of Stuff: Archeological Collections Management in the Northeast Region of the National Park Service*

Alicia Paresi (Northeast Museum Services Center, National Park Service)

The Northeast Region of the National Park Service spans 13 states (Maine-Virginia) and includes 76 park units. The parks in the Northeast Region reflect an extraordinarily rich American heritage with significant cultural resources. In the 1980s the region began a concerted effort to reduce the backlog of the legacy archeology collection. However, in 2002 a survey of

the archeological collections revealed that there were still thousands of artifacts and documentation unaccounted for and current curatorial staffing could not keep up with the inevitable growth of archeological collections. For the past 15 years, Ms. Paresi has provided professional direction for archeological collections management in the Northeast Region. This paper will present the NPS efforts to mitigate the curation crisis and discuss the ways they have used this

2:30 *Curation Crisis, Data Crisis... Perceptions and Realities in Data Collection and Retention in Vermont and Beyond*

Jess Robinson & Scott Dillon (VT State)

There has been a great deal of discussion lately about the crisis of curation in American archaeology. There is no doubt that there are real space constraints for long-term curation in certain areas of the country; particularly within museums and private institutions. Nevertheless, there is no consensus about the data potential of particular artifact classes now and in the future, what is worthy of collection, what is worthless enough to deaccession, and what the cumulative collections in any given area reflect in terms of the totality of the unwritten past. This presentation will reflect on these and other issues with regard to Vermont archaeology.

3:00 *Curation in the Twenty-First Century: An Example from Cultural Resource Management*

Heather Olson (The Public Archaeology Lab, Inc.)

While cultural resource management (CRM) firms typically do not operate as a permanent curation facility, they are responsible for the processing, cataloging, and archival packaging of the archaeological assemblages collected during their projects. Many of the state and federal agencies that oversee any given CRM project maintain their own sets of curation policies and standards to which laboratory curation processes must adhere. The Public Archaeology Laboratory (PAL) in Pawtucket, Rhode Island has maintained an archaeological processing laboratory since its inception more than 30 years ago. PAL has curated collections under numerous sets of curation standards from states in the Northeast and other state and federal agencies. This paper will briefly summarize the history of curation at PAL over the last 30 years, discuss the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) Collection Curation project which is re-curating legacy archaeological collections to modern curation standards, and conclude with a discussion of the most pressing issues affecting the curation of archaeological collections by CRM firms.

3:30 *Update on National Efforts to Address the "Curation Crisis"*

Ellen Marlatt (Independent Archaeological Consulting, LLC)

Cultural Resource Management (CRM) firms, academic, government, and museum settings around the United States have long shared significant challenges regarding archaeological collections. While the problem has been recognized and studied to varying degrees for decades, the latest concerted effort to create workable solutions was launched in 2012 as the Collections Consortium. Participating in this collaboration are representatives of SAA, SHA and ACRA. This paper will offer an update on Consortium strategies to address the issues, results of the latest surveys, and offer next steps in the discussion. As a participant in the task force and a principal in IAC, a private CRM firm, Ms. Marlatt will report particularly on the status and of the issue as it relates to similar firms in the region and around the country.

**Conference
Presentation
Abstracts**

2:30-4:00

Zooarchaeology of Smuttynose Island: A Study of Trophic Relationships in Historic Isles of Shoals**Roxanne E. Guildford & Nathan D. Hamilton (University of Southern Maine)**

The goal of this project is to gain a better understanding of the trophic relationships on Smuttynose Island in the Isles of Shoals during the 17th century historical occupation. Zooarchaeological analysis indicates a heavy reliance on introduced livestock in the historical diet, particularly in domestic pig, sheep or goat, and cow. The faunal assemblage indicates domestic pigs as the primary terrestrial food source for seasonal fishing crews and settlers; cranial fragments and teeth were further analyzed in depth to determine age and culling practices of domesticated animals on the island. Stable carbon and nitrogen isotopic analysis was performed at Bates College on livestock, bird species, and cod; the results indicate a marine-based diet for some of the island-bound pigs, which might suggest foraging in the intertidal zones. The samples for this project were taken from a deeply stratified 17th century occupation area; the excavation area of ca. 20 m² chosen for this project includes domestic pig specimens that were previously analyzed by the author and presented at the University of Southern Maine's Thinking Matters Symposium in 2013 and 2015.

**Conference
Poster
Abstracts**

A Comparison of Post-Contact Lithic Technology Through European Flint Assemblages at the Monhantic Fort site on the Mashantucket Pequot reservation in Connecticut and the Aptucxet Trading Post site in Bourne, Massachusetts**John M. Kelly (Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc.)**

The Monhantic Fort site on the Mashantucket Pequot reservation in southeastern Connecticut and the Aptucxet Trading Post site in Bourne, Massachusetts, have yielded two of the largest assemblages of European flint recovered in southern New England. The flint assemblage from Monhantic Fort, a Mashantucket Pequot fortified village occupied during King Philip's War (1675–1677), is primarily associated with the wartime production of gunflints, although several objects also indicate continued use of lithic tools in domestic contexts. In contrast, the flint assemblage associated with the late seventeenth-century occupation at the Euro-American Aptucxet represent items produced in a peace-time, non-military context. Research on the Monhantic assemblage of European flint prompted a new look at the Aptucxet material to allow for a comparative analysis of the two sites, including spatial analysis of the flint assemblages that indicates individual rather than specialized production of gunflints and tools at Monhantic Fort and production of tools in a single workshop area at Aptucxet by a limited number of indi-

Bringing the Neighborhood Back to Life: Working-Class Consumption and Identity in 19th-Century Roxbury, Massachusetts**Janice Nosal (University of Massachusetts at Boston)**

Working with the past always presents a bevy of challenges for researchers, and when material collections fall into disuse, it can be especially difficult to appreciate their intrinsic value. Incorporating new technological methods (GIS) and primary document research allows archaeologists to synthesize original excavation and background information in innovative ways. The Southwest Corridor Project (Roxbury, Boston, MA), excavated in the 1970s, is a perfect collection for these purposes. Roxbury experienced a significant transformation from an essentially rural community to a more strictly suburban neighborhood during the mid-to-late nineteenth century during which an influx of immigrants settled and worked in the area, often living in multi-family units. Using archaeological material evidence, relevant historical advertisements, and GIS, this ongoing project reinvigorates an aging collection and investigates the role of advertising and material consumption in building and shaping working-class resident identities at the Tremont Street and Elmwood Court Housing sites.

Historic Landscapes in Modern Contexts: Aquinnah GIS, Martha's Vineyard**Submitted by Holly Herbster (Senior Archaeologist) and Jane Miller (GIS Manager)**

The Town of Aquinnah is the ancestral and present-day home of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head/Aquinnah. For the past 25 years, PAL has completed more than 50 survey projects with and for the Tribe, most conducted under a unique town bylaw requiring archaeological review prior to new construction, that have helped to document more than 100 ancient site locations and nineteenth century Native homesteads across the town's five square mile area. PAL staff are working on a long-term collaborative GIS project to make accessible the tremendous amount of oral history, archaeological data, and documentary and ethnohistoric information that has been collected for Aquinnah. Web mapping offers ways to visualize and share this information with archaeologists, tribal members, town planners, and residents to inform, educate, and preserve the historic resources that make this place so unique.

**Professional
Research
Abstracts*****Preservation of the Salt Pond Village Site (RI 110), Narragansett, RI*****Submitted by Joseph N. Waller, Jr. (Senior Archaeologist, PAL)**

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation has recently acquired a 53 acre property threatened by residential development in the town of Narragansett as part of an alternative mitigation effort in lieu of a costly and hazardous data recovery at a Providence bridge project. The Salt Pond Native American village site (RI 110) occupies a ±20-acre parcel situated at the northeast corner of the Point Judith Pond. PAL is assisting the RIDOT with site preservation by completing site documentation and reporting on the site's archaeological content. RI 110 Archaeological investigations have unearthed storage pits, refuse pits, shell pits, cache pits, fire pit, a dog burial, human burials, and hundreds of post or stake holes that form the outlines of some 20 domestic wetus. Artifacts from the site include projectile points, lithic debitage, hammerstones, bifaces and bifacial tool fragments, scrapers, drills, bone tools, pestles, hoes, pendants, a smoking pipe, and hundreds of clay pot sherds. Radiocarbon dates, projectile points, and decorated ceramic sherds attest to intense Native American occupation of the site dating between 1020 and 461 B.P. or ca. 1000 and 1500 A.D.



Conference on New England Archaeology

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